



# Lilac Newsletter

Vol. XIII, No. 8, August, 1987

INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

**INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY** is a non-profit corporation comprised of individuals who share a particular interest, appreciation and fondness for lilacs. Through exchange of knowledge, experience and facts gained by members it is helping to promote, educate and broaden public understanding and awareness.

Articles printed in this publication are the views and opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the editor or the *International Lilac Society*.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE:



We recently received the following letter from the Bickelhaupt in Clinton, Iowa and we shall do our best to accomodate them. Their letter raises two other questions. They are: (1) Do you have Newsletter requests for us? Write, please. (2) I was intrigued by the use made by the Bickelhaupt of the Newsletter. Do you share your Newsletter or its information with anyone? Let us know of it.

4/15/87

**bickelhaupt  
arboretum**

Dr. Owen M. Rogers  
Uni. of New Hampshire  
Durham, NH 03824

Dear Owen Rogers:

We look forward to the Lilac Newsletter and use the information often. We put all the issues in a three-ring notebook and place on our free lending library shelves. This last issue we find printed unusually close to the center fold. I am sure others want to keep them so will you try to point out to printers. Don't mean to imply the size should be changed which often happens and then binders don't fit etc.

Thank you for your attention.

Happy Spring and sincerely

F. K. Bickelhaupt

Co:director



CALENDAR OF EVENTS



The Arnold Arboretum is holding its Annual Rare and Unusual Plant Sale on Sunday, September 20, 1987 from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Free Admission, at the Case Estates in Weston, MA. This event is open to the public and luncheon and beverages will be available. For further information, please call: Arnold Arboretum, The Arborway, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Phone: 617-524-1718.

#### LILAC AS A DUAL-PURPOSE PLANT

"Container-grown lilacs are ideal Easter plants, for which date they can be allowed to come along slowly in a 55-degree house from one month before Easter on."

In reality, like the lilac plants forced for cut flowers, lilac plants could be forced as a container-grown, flowering plant year-round. Show plants in pots should be forced in full light to have the foliage well developed; when the temperature is higher than 76°F, frequent syringing is necessary. When the first flowers expand, the temperature is lowered to 60 to 66°, and when the panicles are about half open the plants are transferred to a cool greenhouse. Hardening-off is essential to ensure good keeping qualities of the flowers.

After forcing, the plant is in the early growth stages of its annual cycle and will not have acquired cold-hardiness; it must be protected from frost and not outplanted into the landscape until spring, or it may be exposed to sequential temperature conditions to induce cold-hardiness and thereafter be stored outdoors.

The most desirable plant habit and production schedule requiring the least amount of time in the greenhouse may possibly be achieved by grafting.

Standard lilacs (small tree-like forms) can be produced by budding onto properly grown stock of the common lilac (Syringa vulgaris) (McKelvey, 1928) (James Green, ONW Editor).

LILAC...YEAR-ROUND CUT FLOWER?....

James L. Green, ONW Editor  
 Extension Horticulture Specialist  
 Nursery & Greenhouse Crops  
 Horticulture Department  
 Oregon State University  
 Corvallis, OR 97331



## LILAC AS A FORCED, CUT FLOWER

## History

The forcing of lilac has been an important industry in Europe for over 200 years. An excellent review of literature on this subject including methods and materials is presented by McKelvey (1928) and by Berg (1981).

In 1774, the white lilac industry began in France with the forcing of *Syringa persica* and 'Rouge de Marly' in caves and cellars; when forced in the dark, these lilacs produced white flowers. According to Carriere and Andre (Review of Horticulture, 1886, page 458; 1890, page 506) there was but one month in the year, mid-July to mid-August, when forced white lilacs were not sold in Paris. As demand for forced white lilac increased in the major cities of Europe, large production areas centered around such cities as Boskoop and Aalsmeer in Holland and Hamburg and Berlin in Germany in addition to Paris, France.

In the early years of the Cooperative Aalsmeer Auction (CAA), almost 50% of the product consisted of lilacs. Because of the increase of many other cut flowers, the percentage of lilacs has now decreased to 1.5% of total cut flower sales through the CAA. However, the total production of cut, flowering lilac branches since World War II by CAV growers has remained essentially constant at 7-8 million branches per year. Demand and selling price increased following development in 1973 of a flower preservative that increased vase life from 3 days up to 10 days; increased selling price has resulted in an increase in production. (Berg, 1981).

Production of lilac as a cut flower has been rather stable for a number of reasons: it is a unique product with little competition (substitution) from other cut flower crops; there is little production of cut lilac outside of The Netherlands; the long cultivation period provides little opportunity for opportunistic growers; and, production is labor intensive with labor being approximately 50% of the total production costs.

To lower production costs by reducing the time the lilac plants are held in the forcing greenhouse, the possibility of cutting lilac branches at the tight flower bud stage of development then opening the flower buds by holding the cut branches in a solution of sucrose and antimicrobial chemicals has been investigated.

In the United States, demand for forced lilac flowers, primarily obtained from plants imported from Europe and then forced in the U.S., increased until Quarantine 37 went into effect on June 1, 1919. Recently the use and demand is once again increasing and is being primarily supplied by imported, cut-flower lilac.

RECENT ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

In 1983, the Dutch flower auctions supplied 12 million flowering lilac branches to florists throughout the world. "Lilacs are increasingly popular each year, with demand the highest for white lilacs, but the blue varieties are gaining attention," say the Dutch. "The white variety 'Madame Florent Stepman' and the lavender-blue 'Hugo Koster' are at the top of the list...demand for flowering cut foliage increased 15 percent over the previous year." (SFN, 1984). The San Francisco Wholesale Ornamental Crops Report for Wednesday, April 4, 1984, reported the demand on the San Francisco Wholesale for cut lilac was steady, offerings of indoor grown cut lilac from Holland were light, and purple lilac was selling at \$8.75/bunch of 10 stems (87.5¢ each). On the same market report the highest wholesale price reported for a tea rose was 36¢. To put this into perspective, however, it should be noted that the Dutch grower's net profit per stem is approximately 2 cents (Berg, 1981); the rose grower's net profit per stem is also approximately 2 cents.

In 1980, 221,000 stems of flowering lilac were imported from The Netherlands into the United States, primarily from mid-October through mid-May. In 1982, the total number of stems of flowering lilac imported into the United States increased to 516,000. There was a 2.3-fold increase in the import of flowering lilac from 1980 to 1982. Of the 516,000 stems imported in 1982, 4,000 stems came from Colombia, South America; 7,000 stems came from South Africa; and, 505,000 stems came from The Netherlands. Other countries from which we have imported cut flowering lilacs in the past include Costa Rica and Israel. Compilation of statistics for 1983 import of lilac flowers into the U.S. has not yet been completed by the Federal-State Market News Service. (California Ornamental Crops Report, 1981, 1982).

\* \* \* \* \*

Owen M. Rogers

Do your lilacs wilt as soon as they are cut? How long do they last? Will hammering the stems improve keeping quality? Does foliage on the stems shorten cut bloom life?

We set up an experiment this spring to try to answer some of these questions. We used cut blooms from 'Charles Joly' taken when the first blooms were fully open but many buds were still unopened. The stems were cut late in the day and plunged immediately into a bucket of warm water. We then set up the treatments and put the stems into warm water to which a standard commercial flower preservative had been added. After an overnight stay in a cool spot the vases were brought out into a simulated home environment. The four treatments were these:

1. Clean-cut stems with foliage left on
2. Clean-cut stems with all foliage removed
3. Hammered stems with foliage left on
4. Hammered stems with all foliage removed

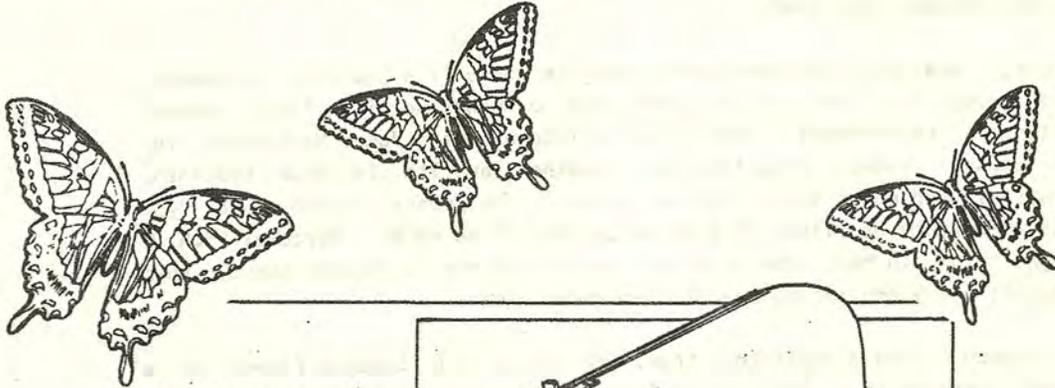
As I reported in Denver, it was those initial treatments that were important since no stems wilted and all stems had survived with good quality to the date of the convention. I can now report that that is true through the life of the bloom. All treatments maintained quality for eleven days and those with the foliage removed for twelve days. At the end of that time the flowers still looked good generally but the earliest florets had gone by and a panel of three people decided that the blooms had reached the point where they could not be sold. At home, in a mixed bouquet, the flowers could have been continued for several additional days.

So, hammering the stems does not lengthen the life of cut lilac stems. What does lengthen the life is to cut the stems early in the morning (or late in the afternoon), plunge them immediately into warm water to which a flower preservative has been added and harden them in a cool place for several hours before displaying. If you want to add a day to the life of the stems, remove all the foliage when the stems are cut.

There are still too many variables in the above paragraph (i.e., time of day to cut, flower preservative, hardening time) so next year we are going to have to set up another experiment to find out which of those initial treatments is most important.

## OUT OF PRINT REFERENCES

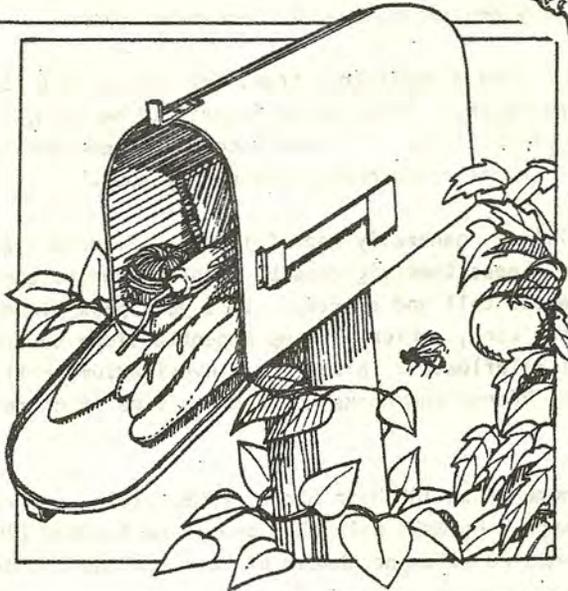
We have had a request for a source of a copy of Dr. John Wister's "Lilacs for America." It was published in 1953 and has been out of print for some time. Does anyone in the Society have a copy that they would be willing to donate or sell? If so, would you please contact Dr. Owen M. Rogers, Plant Science Dept., University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824. Also, if members have other lilac references e.g., Wister's book on "Lilac Culture" or McKelvey's "Lilac" that they would like to sell or donate, the Newsletter would be a good place to advertise that fact.



### ***Mailbox For Tools***

Hand tools aren't very useful if they're in the house while you're in the garden. Keep them close at hand by putting up a rural-type mailbox in your garden. It makes a handy, waterproof catch-all for small, easily forgotten items like clippers, trowels, notebooks, gloves and string.

**Louise S. Milton**  
*Augusta, Georgia*



Editor's Note: Here is another of Eliot Tozer's profiles of an ILS member and his planting. It was originally published this spring in Yankee Magazine.

People who grow to love one kind of flower often become collectors, seeking out specimens of every known variety. People who really love a flower collect only the best varieties and share them with anyone who comes to call. Bernard McLaughlin, master of a fine old house in South Paris, began collecting lilacs almost 50 years ago and has since shared their fragrant beauty with thousands of friends and strangers. By count, more than 1,700 people "dropped by" to see his lilacs, wildflowers, and perennials between May and October last year.

Bernard, who would be everyone's favorite uncle if a national referendum were held, told me that he plants what he thinks he will like, whether early or late bloomers. He likes the late-blooming James MacFarlane for its unusual clear, pink flowers. Another favorite is Blue Hyacinth, beautiful for color and a vigorous grower. He prunes often because "you lose the beauty of lilacs if they're too tall," he said. Marechal Foch, a bright pink in bud, changing to a mauve in bloom is another beauty that requires heavy pruning to keep its splendor close.

We stopped beside a delicate, true, rich blue with abundant flowers on a nicely shaped bush. "This is my favorite," he said. "I'll tell you why. It was one of my first. I transplanted it around the grounds and it always stood out. In color and habit it's really tops."

Although lilacs generally want full sun, Bernard's grow well in dappled shade. He keeps them vigorous by pruning down to the ground those stems which grow too tall and coarse. This year peak bloom will be by May 26 to 27. In the Lane, which runs up a gentle slope toward heavy woods, are hundreds of wildflowers: bloodroot, cyripedium, trillium, spring beauty. And ferns. "Ferns and rocks would satisfy me if there were nothing else," he said.

Bernard's home is at 101 Main Street (Rte. 26), and visitors are welcome without charge. He asks only that groups call ahead (207-743-8453). South Paris is about 20 miles northwest of Lewiston-Auburn, Maine.

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